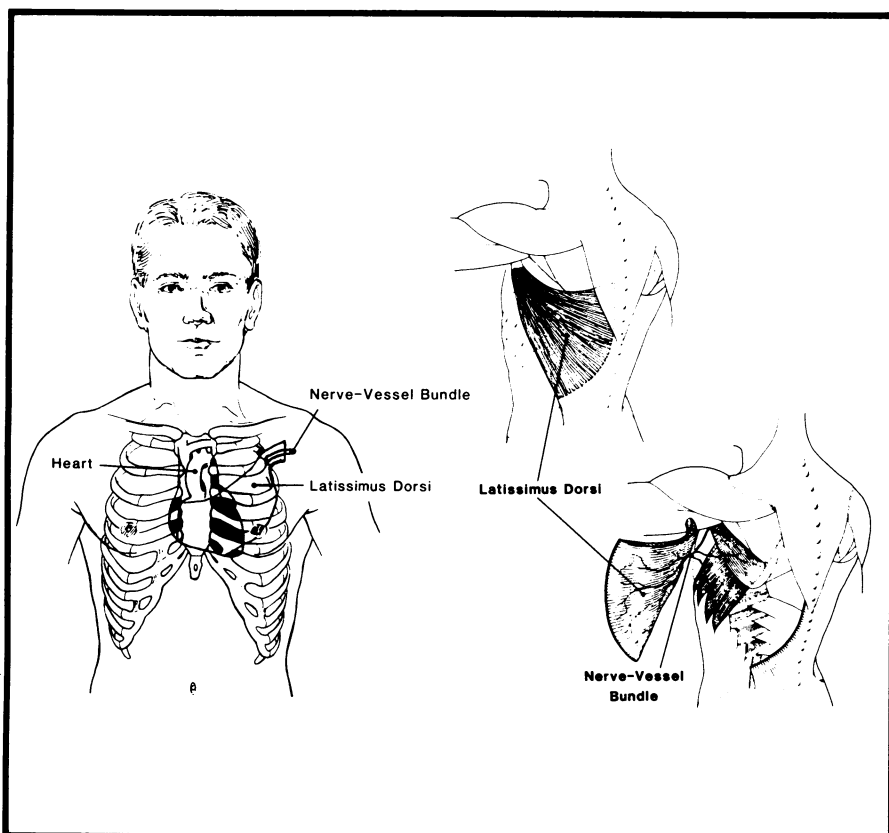




In the heart-wrap procedure performed at Allegheny General Hospital, the left latissimus dorsi was isolated with its nerve-vessel bundle intact, brought through the ribs and wrapped around the heart.

Letters continued from p. 275

The nature/nurture controversy is more than a curiosity keeping social scientists happy. Hundreds of billions of dollars are at stake. For starters, it keeps social scientists employed in large numbers, and influential. Psychologists' theories are implemented by the Department of Health and Human Services and numberless state and community social service, welfare and education organizations. After all, if genes primarily determine our nature, what's left for the "human betterment" industry to do? Only by claiming the supremacy of environment in determining behavior can psychologists, psychiatrists, behaviorists, etc. justify today's vast expenditures by the education-welfare establishment.

Whether Skinner and crew should be permitted to continue calling themselves scientists is another topic. Maybe sufficient proof has been accumulated by microbiologists, neurophysiologists and other "hard" scientists in fields of behavior and personality to allow a challenge to social science orthodoxy and to reclaim the honorable title of scientist.

Brigitte Whitaker
Falls Church, Va.

A peach's family tree

Luther Burbank was a renowned plant breeder, but he did not develop the Elberta peach as stated in "The importance of being inventive" (SN: 2/22/86, p. 123). Elberta originated from a seed of Chinese Cling planted by Samuel Rumph of nearby Marshallville, Ga., in 1870. It was named for his wife. A second seed from this tree produced the famous Georgia Belle peach. Burbank did patent July Elberta

peach, a completely different peach of unknown parentage. July Elberta was quite successful but did not have the historical impact of Elberta.

W.R. Okie
J.M. Thompson
USDA Fruit Breeders
Byron, Ga.

Vaccine vs. blood screen?

Obviously if an AIDS vaccine becomes a reality ("AIDS vaccine research: Promising protein," SN: 3/8/86, p. 151), those harboring the disease will carry the same antibodies as a vaccinated person. How then will we protect our blood bank by antibody detection?

Frank Burnham
Orangeburg, S.C.

According to Howard Streicher of the National Cancer Institute in Bethesda, Md., it's an interesting question but the problem is not likely to keep researchers up at night. While antibodies produced in response to a vaccine might indeed give a false positive result on current screening tests, it's quite possible that when — and if — a vaccine is developed, the problem could be avoided by fine-tuning the tests. For example, if a vaccine is based on protein from the AIDS virus's surface, the screening test could check for the presence of antibodies to proteins from the viral core.

—L. Davis

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longer. Recently they compared electrical conditioning with allowing the muscle a rest period of several weeks in its new locale before firing it up. They found that a combination of the two resulted in the most fatigue resistance.

They also started out studying patches sewn into the heart; now, in dogs, they are working with pouches made of latissimus dorsi "wrapped like an ice cream cone," attached to a pacemaker and hooked into the circulation. The pouches sit behind the dogs' right legs, where they don't hinder the animals' activity, and can pump as much as two-fifths of what the heart can, Stephenson says.

In humans, he says, such a pump could lessen the burden on ailing hearts by delivering 2 liters of blood a minute — one-third the normal output of the heart. The operation would be easier and less expensive than implanting an artificial heart and could be ready for human use in two to five years, he estimates. "We know it will eventually work," he says.

Richard A. Clark, chief of surgery at the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute in Bethesda, Md., commenting on heart muscle transplants in general, says, "It will probably take a considerable period to learn the limitations of the procedure as well as its attributes." However, he adds, "Muscular augmentation by some other muscle as a general concept is valid. I think it has potential." □

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